

UPDATE

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MISSION STATEMENT

“To provide a service that will influence, support and enable timely and appropriate strategies and programmes to help prevent disasters from occurring, to guide organisations on how to adapt to climate change and reduce their environmental footprint, and to promote early and sustainable environmental recovery to affected communities to ensure that neither peoples’ livelihoods nor the environment are unnecessarily impaired during subsequent recovery and rehabilitation.”

1. INSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

ProAct Network was established in May 2007 and is formally registered as a non-profit making non-governmental organisation (NGO) in Switzerland. ProAct’s aim is to function with a small core staff but to develop and help support a global network of specialist partner agencies and individuals, giving particular emphasis to in-country capacity strengthening.

The Network offers a suite of environmental management services intended to help prevent and reduce the impact of disasters and to assist with the recovery processes by providing timely and appropriate technical assistance. Services include research and technical assistance to institutions, practical hands-on support at the field level, as well as policy guidance and institutional capacity building and development.

ProAct works to support a range of UN agencies, humanitarian and development aid-focused NGOs, as well as national and local governments. Its ultimate objective is to help reduce the impact of disasters on communities and to help ensure that neither peoples’ livelihoods nor the environment are unnecessarily impaired during subsequent recovery and rehabilitation.



Since its formation, ProAct has been well received by UN agencies, humanitarian and development organisations, as well as like-minded environmental NGOs. The network already has strong links with organisations such as the UN/International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR), the World Bank, CARE International, UNHCR, FAO, UNDP, UNICEF, UNEP, UN/ECLAC, the Global Humanitarian Forum, OSCE, WHO, IFRC, IIED and ICDR and has become an active partner to the Inter-Agency Steering Committee (IASC), providing support to many of its clusters. ProAct Network has also entered into collaborative agreements with other

organisations such as IUCN-International Union for the Conservation of Nature, the Swedish Rescue Services Agency (SRSA), UNEP-GRID Arendal, Disaster Waste Recovery, World Wide Fund For Nature (WWF), the Gaia Group, the Shelter Centre and others.

2. ACTIVITIES

The following section highlights some key activities of the organisation, which include research, policy development and policy advice to humanitarian and development organisations as well as field work in areas such as environmental and livelihood security and environmental assessments.

2.1 Development of knowledge base

The professional technical expertise – both academic and practical – of ProAct’s staff and members means that the organisation is able to be represented at different international and local fora. This offers important occasions for networking and establishing contacts, as well as influencing policies and practical decisions.

In addition to the organisation’s own existing expertise, a conscious effort was made to strengthen the body of knowledge available on the issue of climate adaptation, given the clear and important links and implications with disaster risk reduction. In this regard, ProAct – with support from the Ministry of Environment, Finland, and in collaboration with UN/ISDR and selected academic institutions and individuals – is undertaking a global survey to investigate both traditional and scientific experiences in the use of environmental management and ecosystems as natural buffers for climate change impacts.



The review – now underway, with preliminary recommendations expected in June 2008 – will also assess the potential for accessing funding opportunities through carbon markets to finance locally developed, sustainable projects that would:

- a) reduce the risks and/or scale of certain disasters;
- b) help vulnerable communities adapt to at least some of the effects of climate change; and
- c) provide security and added long-term benefits for vulnerable communities and their immediate environments.

With similar intent, ProAct is working with the Shelter Centre to produce a series of informative booklets on specific and recurrent topics related to humanitarian and relief assistance programmes. This work is based on the recognition that – when faced with an emergency situation – people are drawn into roles with which they may not be entirely

familiar. Even specialists in one area may need assistance in order to guide decisions being taken in other sectors. With pressure mounting and with little time or resources available, people may not always be able to access or absorb some of the best technical guidance. These booklets, and accompanying web links and training, provide a source of quick information and solutions to some of the most commonly experienced issues. Initial titles are on “Asbestos” and “Shelter-related Waste”.

2.2 Support to UN/ISDR

Following the active participation of ProAct at the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction (5-7 June 2007), and many of its working groups – most notably the Working Group on Ecosystems and Environment Management for Disaster Reduction – ProAct has been requested to establish and co-ordinate a North-South NGO platform of information exchange on disaster risk reduction. ProAct has also been requested to co-ordinate a chapter to be included in a report on climate change being compiled for the UN Secretary General.

2.2 Support to IASC

Since its formation, ProAct has – with CARE International – played a supporting role to many of the IASC clusters, particularly Emergency Shelter (ESC), Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) and Camp Co-ordination and Camp Management (CCCM). ProAct is now strategically positioned to help ensure that environmental considerations will be considered as a routine part of the response mechanism in new emergencies and recovery programmes.



ProAct has also been selected as a member in the IASC Cluster on Early Recovery, and an observer to the IASC Task Force on Safe Access to Firewood and alternative Energy in Humanitarian Settings, and has contributed to this on a number of occasions.

2.4 Field work

In response to requests from some of its partner organisations, ProAct provided a range of technical guidance to field operations, some highlights of which are outlined below.

Liberia. Working with IUCN, ProAct is supporting the development of a strategic environmental assessment for the forestry sector in Liberia. In a country where so much emphasis and pressure is being placed on forest resources, an assessment of this nature is of prime importance in order to manage these ecosystems in an appropriate manner that

will help ensure the rightful, efficient but sustainable use of forest products without compromising the needs of local communities.

Work undertaken by ProAct includes initial fact-finding and stakeholder consultations, followed by technical analyses. Outcomes thus far include agreement by the World Bank to extend and expand the scale of the assessment, to cover not only commercial forestry and conservation but also community forestry. Agreement was also reached to organise a broader regional consultation process that will enable more stakeholders to share their concerns and needs.

Democratic Republic of Congo. In response to the emergency situation provoked by conflict in North Kivu Province, ProAct was requested to provide technical assistance in relation to the establishment and management of camps for internally displaced people. At the time the ProAct mission was fielded, four IDP camps had already developed within a 12km radius of Goma town. All of the sites were close to the Virunga National Park, a UNESCO World Heritage Site and a Biosphere Reserve. One was even within the physical gazetted boundary of the park. The park is home to one of the two surviving populations of mountain gorillas (fewer than 380 survive in the Virungas and only around 700 worldwide), but also hosts a rich biological diversity typical of Afromontane forest habitats.



Key issues identified as a result of the rapid environmental assessment carried out, included an urgent need for emergency shelter provisions as people had no alternative but to cut young trees and branches to construct shelters and to gather thatching materials such as banana leaves and assorted grasses. Both practices were a source of growing

tensions and potential conflict between displaced people and local farmers. Other threats and risks to people and the environment were identified and a preliminary action plan developed to address these prime concerns.

Mexico. In November 2007, storms and heavy rainfall combined to deliver heavy and prolonged flooding the State of Tabasco, south-east Mexico, with an estimated 1.5 million people affected. The flooding resulted in large scale displacement and damage to housing. It also produced considerable quantities of waste which needed to be collected, sorted and disposed of properly.

In association with Disaster Waste Recovery and the Swedish Rescue Service Agency, and upon request from the Governor of the State, the assessment mission undertaken by ProAct provided training and practical guidance in terms of waste management and an environmental health and safety assessment. The mission also identified a number of potential natural hazards in the immediate region and further upstream which, if not addressed, could lead to further and larger disasters, environmental degradation and loss of life. ProAct expects to remain engaged in providing support to the people of Tabasco and neighbouring states in 2008 through a range of follow-up activities identified during this mission.

Pakistan. The earthquake which struck Pakistan-administered Kashmir and parts of the North-West Frontier Province on 8 October 2005 killed more than 50,000 people and rendered at least three million homeless. In co-operation with UNDP-Pakistan, the role of the ProAct Network has been to strategically advise on programme development, in support of the overall Environmental Recovery Programme in Pakistan. Anticipated assistance to be provided in 2008 includes providing expertise on land stabilization and waste management as well as with general support to the overall national effort.

South Ossetia. Environmental and security assessments conducted in 2004 identified environmental degradation in the frozen conflict zones of the southern Caucasus – Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia – as a high priority. One of the issues within this priority is that of waste, where conflicts can generate significant quantities of waste by default, including demolition rubble, depleted uranium and unexploded ordinance, as well as waste from camps established to cater for internally displaced people. ProAct, in collaboration with OSCE, has worked with UNEP-GRID and Disaster Waste Recovery to study the environmental and waste situation in the region with the aim of identifying waste management initiatives that would not only improve municipal waste collection and disposal systems and waste policies and strategies, but would also create an opportunity for a peace-building process.



The development of waste management programmes during the peace-building process can represent an opportunity to establish appropriate waste management systems for former and current waste loads. It can also help address future needs, which is an important consideration given that peace often results in economic investment in the industrial, commercial, mining and/or tourism sectors.

Ethiopia. The recent return to peace in southern Sudan has meant that refugees from neighbouring countries have now, finally been able to return home. Closing camps which in this case may have existed for 15 or more years and dealing with the environmental needs in terms of rehabilitation is one of the areas in which ProAct members have extensive experience. Working with the government of Ethiopia, UNHCT, the UN Country Team, CARE and IUCN, ProAct is helping develop a strategic approach and programme for implementation in western Ethiopia. Once funded, this 3-year programme will bring much assistance to poor rural (former host) communities in two states of western Ethiopia. Similar activities are due to begin in Uganda and Kenya, through the same partnership structures.

Sudan. The continued presence of almost one million displaced people in Darfur is having a significant impact on critical resources, particularly groundwater and vegetation. Fuel-efficient stoves are being promoted by a wide range of agencies across Darfur, but this is often happening on an ad hoc basis. ProAct is now concluding a review of the effectiveness of this initiative from the perspective of institutional approaches, efficiency and effectiveness. The findings are likely to lead to a major realignment of the way in which this programme– which, while much needed, is often abused – is approached in the coming years.



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